

Moses Bulkley House  
176 Main Street  
Southport  
Fairfield County  
Connecticut

HABS No. CONN-299

HABS  
CONN,  
I-SOUPD.  
12-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. CONN-299

MOSES BULKLEY HOUSE

Location: 176 Main Street, Southport, Fairfield County,  
Connecticut

USGS Westport Quadrangle Map; Universal Transverse  
Mercator Coordinates: 18.644020.4554860

Present Owner  
and Occupant: Fred and Elizabeth Lack

Present Use: Residence

Statement of  
Significance: The Moses Bulkley house was designed by the Bridge-  
port architects Lambert & Bunnell and erected 1861.  
It is a stunning example of American Pointed Gothic  
architecture. Characteristic of the Gothic mode,  
the structure is designed on a cruciform plan. The  
distinguishing feature of this style is the pointed  
arch; the dominant visual impression of the Bulkley  
house is its acute angular form. Expansive pointed  
gables trimmed with a gingerbread vergeboard, pointed  
arched windows, ogee arches trimmed with jigsaw  
tracery on the veranda, and a tall square tower top-  
ped with a steeply-pitched pyramidal roof and crowned  
by an Early English style finial at the apex create  
this sense of verticality. Moses Bulkley was a  
patron of the arts and literature. The Bulkleys are  
one of Southport's leading families.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Two entries in the personal journal of  
Rufus W. Bunnell apparently refer to the Captain Moses  
Bulkley residence. He writes, "Among other work of 1861  
was a gothic house for a wealthy Southport man, that gave  
us \$112." In August of 1861, Bunnell mentioned that he and  
Lambert walked to Southport and made a final visit to the  
new "B" house that they had planned. "Capt. B" casually  
asked the two architects how they had travelled from Bridge-  
port. They replied that they had walked.

Stylistic details, highly ornate carved wooden trim, and the residence's substantial proportions strongly suggest that Bunnell was referring to the Moses Bulkley residence in his journal entries.

2. Architects: Lambert & Bunnell. Henry A. Lambert and Rufus W. Bunnell were a Bridgeport architectural firm who designed buildings in Southport during the 1860s and 70s. Their work here included the Moses Bulkley house, the Mrs. Benjamin Pomeroy House (Conn-298), the Mrs. Zalmon Wakeman House (Conn-297), and the Southport Congregational Church (Conn-311). According to Bunnell, for a considerable period during the latter part of the nineteenth century, he and Lambert were the only architects practicing in the Bridgeport area. In 1881, two items in the Bridgeport "Standards" newspaper listed Lambert as practicing alone, which indicates that the partners had separated, or Bunnell had retired or died.
3. Original and subsequent owners: An 1858 and an 1860 map of Fairfield and vicinity list Moses and George Bulkley as the owners of this plot of land. They had acquired the land in 1853. Following is a chain of title to the property, beginning in 1853. Records cited are in the Office of the Recorder of Deeds, Fairfield Town Hall, Fairfield, Connecticut.
  - 1853 Deed, November 11, 1853, recorded in Volume 51, page 28. Levi W. and Henrietta Burr to George Bulkley.
  - 1862 Deed, September 5, 1862, recorded in Volume 54, page 516. George Bulkley to Moses Bulkley.
  - 1868 November 1868, Will of Moses Bulkley to Frederick Bulkley.
  - 1869 Quit Claim Deed, November 25, 1869, recorded in Volume 57, page 623. Frederick Bulkley to Oliver Bulkley.
  - 1904 Deed, January 11, 1904, recorded in Volume 75, page 205. Estate of Oliver Bulkley to Amelia G. Bulkley.
  - 1907 Deed, May 27, 1907, recorded in Volume 76, page 51-57. Estate of Amelia G. Bulkley to Annie L. Bulkley and Katie. A. B. Jennings.
  - 1923 Deed, April 2, 1923, recorded in Volume 105, page 57. Annie L. Bulkley and Katie A. B. Jennings to Florence B. Keets.

- 1945 Deed, May 1, 1945, recorded in Volume 199, page 611.  
Florence B. Keets to Dorothy E. Whiting.
- 1957 Deed, August 1, 1957, recorded in Book 366, page 252.  
Dorothy E. Whiting to Fred R. and Elizabeth A. Lack.

4. Builders, suppliers: Northrop Brothers, a prominent Southport lumber and building firm, received many of the contracts for the finest and most elegant commissions in town. Their works included Trinity Church (Conn-312), Southport Congregational Church (Conn-311), Southport Savings Bank (Conn-315), and the Charles Gilman House at 177 Main Street. It is therefore quite possible that Northrop was the builder/carpenter for the Bulkley house.
5. Original plan and construction: The Bulkley house's cruciform plan is characteristic of Gothic architecture, which had its origins in twelfth-and thirteenth-century English church design. It is two-and-a-half stories with partially exposed basement and measures fifty feet square around the perimeter. The wooden balloon frame is covered with horizontal clapboarding. The wide, overhanging eaves are created by projecting roof surfaces.

The distinguishing feature of Early Gothic Revival architecture in America is the pointed arch. The dominant impression of the Bulkley house is its verticality, an acute angular form. This is achieved by large pointed gables trimmed with a scallop-pattern gingerbread vergeboard, twin pointed-arched windows within a pointed arch opening, thin wooden posts which support the front veranda and forming ogee arches trimmed with jigsaw Gothic tracery, and the 1886 three-and-a-half story square tower with pointed gable-roofed dormers piercing its steeply-pitched pyramidal roof. The entire composition is completed by an Early English style finial capping the pointed apex of the tower. The Bulkley house is a stunning and excellent specimen of Pointed Carpenter Gothic architecture.

6. Alterations and additions: The three-and-a-half story square tower with pyramidal roof was added in 1886. On October 21, 1886, the Southport "Chronicle" reported that "Work upon the addition to the residence of Oliver Bulkley is progressing, and the new tower now stands so as to show its good proportions, and the improvement to the appearance of the residence is already evident." Further alterations were completed in 1891 by Northrop Brothers, though what these actually included is unknown. The "Chronicle" recorded on April 2, 1891 that "Northrop Bros. began work on the alterations of the Moses Bulkley place Tuesday."

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

Moses Bulkley was a prosperous sea captain and ship-owner involved in the sea commerce of the Mill River harbor. His son, Oliver was born in Southport and married Amelia Gilbert of New Haven. Though he was without a common profession, he was a generous patron of the arts and literature.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Bunnell, Rufus W. Personal journal. In the possession of Joanna Zangrando of New Haven, Connecticut.

Fairfield County Deed Records, Office of the Recorder, Fairfield Town Hall, Fairfield, Connecticut.

Fairfield County Probate Records, Probate Court, Fairfield Town Hall, Fairfield.

2. Secondary and published sources:

The Bulkeley Genealogy, Rev. Peter Bulkeley. Donald L. Jacobus, compiler. New Haven: Tuttle, Morehouse & Taylor Co., 1933.

Southport "Chronicle," September 9, 1886; October 21, 1886; april 2, 1891.

Prepared by Jan E. Cigliano  
Staff Historian  
Historic American  
Buildings Survey  
January 1979

PART II. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the Southport Historic District Commission, several members of whom provided the necessary funds. The project was completed in the summer of 1966 under the general direction of James C. Massey, then the Chief of HABS; Ralph Schwarz of the Ford Foundation; and Architect John C. Waite (Columbia University); with assistant architects Christopher Benninger (Harvard University), Richard Haines (University of Kentucky), and Andrew Craig Morrison (University of Michigan), and architectural historian David T. VanZanten (Harvard University), at the HABS Field Office in Southport, Connecticut. The data was prepared and edited in HABS Washington office in December 1978 by Jan E. Cigliano, staff historian. Photographs were taken by HABS staff photographer Jack E. Boucher in September 1966.